

## Geographical Units in the USSR

The summary translations of Soviet articles on amateur radio frequently contain what may initially be bewildering references to krays, oblasts, rayons, RSFSR, SSRs, ASSRs, etc. A basic understanding of the geographical breakdown of the USSR is useful since the two organizations regularly mentioned in connection with the amateur service -- DOSAAF and radio sport federations -- are organized on the basis of the larger geographical units. The geographical units used in the USSR are unique and do not match up with ones used in other countries; to avoid ambiguity in cases where straightforward English translations do not exist and where a single English term might be used to translate different Russian terms -- e.g. "region" for both oblast' and rayon -- the Russian term -- with anglicized plural -- has been preserved.

In Soviet usage, "nationality" refers to ethnic origin, not country of allegiance. The union republics themselves constitute the top level of nationality-based units, being based on the dominant ethnic group residing within their borders. Each SSR has its own language, flag, Council of Ministers; indeed the Soviet Constitution guarantees the union republics the formal right of withdrawal from the Union.

Constitutionally, the USSR is just what the letters stand for -- a "Union" of "Soviet Socialist Republics." The highest level, that of the country as a whole, is indicated by terms such as "all-union," "of the USSR," or "of the Soviet Union."

The 15 soviet socialist republics are what are normally thought of as the constituent parts of the USSR -- Russia itself (the RSFSR), the Ukraine, Belorussia (White Russia), Georgia, Uzbekistan, etc. They are termed union republics to differentiate them from autonomous SSRs (see below). Any given location in the USSR lies within one union republic or another. The Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic -- the RSFSR -- occupies roughly three quarters of the land mass of the USSR; as its title suggests, the RSFSR has a federated substructure and indeed is sometimes referred to as the "Russian Federation."

The union republics are divided into variously named units, the most common being the oblast' and the next-most-common the kray. Krays are usually more extensive in area and sparser in population than oblasts. Some of the smaller union republics lack the oblast'/kray level entirely and break down directly into rayons (see below).

If a portion of a union republic is inhabited principally by a distinct ethnic group, it may be designated an autonomous soviet socialist republic -- an ASSR -- instead of an oblast' or kray; ASSRs have a more complex governmental structure -- council of ministers, language, etc. -- than do oblasts or krays. Lower down on the "nationality" scale are autonomous oblasts and autonomous okrugs (okrug = district), the former subordinate to a union republic and the latter to an oblast' or kray. The Soviet amateur press occasionally reports DXpeditions to remote "nationality"-based units.

Rayons, literally "regions" (but "region" is sometimes used to translate oblast'), are, along with the union republics, the most pervasive units in the country. A comparable unit in Canada, the UK, or the USA would be the county. Large cities such as Moscow have rayons within their borders, a reversal of the normal hierarchal relationship.

At the local level there are cities and towns (the Russian word gorod meaning both), villages (selo, or in the Caucasus aul), settlements, and "rural populated points."



